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## Activists slam Turkish publisher's conviction

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By Emma Ross-Thomas

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Activists condemned on Thursday the conviction of a Turkish publisher under a controversial law which Ankara reformed just two months ago in a bid to satisfy EU demands for greater freedom of expression.

Writers' organization International PEN said the conviction of Ragip Zarakolu for insulting Turkey showed that Ankara's reform of penal code article 301 was meaningless.

The reform removed a reference to "insulting Turkishness," for which dozens of writers including Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk had been put on trial -- but it is still a crime to insult the Turkish nation and state. Justice Ministry approval is now needed to open a case.

"This is a very clear example that the so-called amendment of 301 is good for nothing. It was just a bad joke," International PEN chief Eugene Schougin told Reuters, adding that there were more than 80 such cases pending against writers and journalists.

Turkish writers had warned before the April amendment that they would continue to be targeted by nationalist prosecutors.

"This court decision seems to bear out our worst fears that the changes to the law won't necessarily make a difference," said Human Rights Watch's Turkey researcher Emma Sinclair-Webb.

The ruling AK Party defended the changes to article 301 saying that other members of the European Union, which Ankara wants to join, have similar rules. Brussels welcomed the reform as a step forward but called for further moves.

Turkey has several other laws limiting free speech and this week a popular transsexual singer, Bulent Ersoy, was on trial for "turning people against military service" for comments she made on television, local media reported.

Publisher Zarakolu was sentenced to five months in jail, convertible into a fine, but will appeal, Schougin said. Zarakolu was not available to comment.

He was tried for publishing a translation of a book about the Armenian massacres, which Ankara denies amounted to genocide. George Jerjian's "The Truth Will Set Us Free" is a call for reconciliation between Turks and Armenians and tells the story of how a Turk saved the writer's Armenian grandmother.

Pamuk was also tried for his comments about the Armenian massacres, but his case was dropped. Armenian-Turkish editor Hrant Dink was convicted under 301 for his calls for reconciliation between Turks and Armenians before he was shot dead in Istanbul by a teenage nationalist last year.

(Editing by Tim Pearce)

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